DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 072 UD 033 546

AUTHOR	Kot, Veronika; Bruner, Charles
TITLE	Resident Experts: Supporting Neighborhood Organizations and Individuals in Collecting and Using Information. Resource Brief 9.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Service Integration, New York, NY.; Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	40p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Center for Service Integration, Child and Family Policy Center, 218 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1021, Des Moines, IA 50309-4006 ($4). Web site: http://www.cfpciowa.org.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizen Participation; *Community Change; *Community Involvement; *Community Planning; Data Analysis; *Data Collection; *Information Utilization; Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS	Grassroots Efforts; Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

This publication presents information on how neighborhood residents can be involved in collecting needed information about their community which they can use to guide reform efforts. Researchers interviewed people with experience collecting information at the neighborhood level, other researchers, leaders of community based organizations, and residents participating in data collection. Chapter 1 describes lessons learned from these experiences and suggests underlying principles to guide neighborhood-based information collection. Next, researchers identified and categorized specific information collection activities in which neighborhood residents had participated and which resulted in positive change. Chapter 2 describes these types of information collection and use, offering illustrations and resources. Researchers also met with residents and community activists involved at the grassroots level in collecting and using information. Chapter 3 summarizes insights shared at that meeting. An appendix presents a list of organizations that have been leaders in information collection efforts at the neighborhood level. (SM)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR SERVICE INTEGRATION

RESOURCE BRIEF

9

Resident Experts: Supporting Neighborhood Organizations and Individuals in Collecting and Using Information

Veronika Kot and Charles Bruner

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The operating philosophy of NCSI, consistent with its mission, is to collaborate with and complement, rather than attempt to replace other clearinghouses, consortia, and institutions working in similar and related activities.

In June, 1995, the Child and Family Policy Center assumed responsibility to disseminate the publications produced by NCSI. Although federal funding for NCSI has ended, NCSI will continue to produce resource briefs, guidebooks, and other publications on issues communities and states face in developing more comprehensive, community-based service systems.

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FOREWORD

Resident Experts represents the product of three different but related attempts to answer the question, "How can neighborhood residents be involved in collecting needed information about their community, which they can use to guide their reform efforts?"

The first involved interviewing a variety of people who have had experience in collecting information at the neighborhood level, from researchers to leaders of community-based organizations to residents participating in data collection activities. Chapter One describes the "lessons learned" from these experiences and suggests underlying principles that should guide neighborhood-based information collection.

The second sought to identify, and then categorize, specific information collection activities in which neighborhood residents have participated that have resulted in positive change. Chapter Two describes these different types of information collection and use, providing illustrations and specific resources for each.

The third involved a spirited meeting with residents and community activists who have been involved at the grassroots in collecting and using information. Chapter Three provides a summary of the insights shared at that meeting.

Finally, several organizations have been leaders in information collection efforts at the neighborhood level and have materials and information that are particularly useful for resident-led efforts to collect and use information. These organizations are described in the Appendix.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided support to the Child and Family Policy Center in conducting this work. Ralph Smith initially encouraged the Center to pursue this task in order to help inform the Foundation's Neighborhood Transformation and Family Development (NTFD) Initiative. Cindy Guy, Garland Yates, Janice Nittoli, and Ira Barbell all provided guidance, support, and offered helpful critiques. In addition to all those who consented to be interviewed and those who participated in the focus group, the authors offer special thanks to Gary Walker and his staff, Ada Skyles, and Ron Register for reviewing and commenting on earlier drafts. Hopefully, *Resident Experts* will help in information collection and use in systems reform activities.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Veronika Kot, Senior Research Associate with the Child and Family Policy Center, focuses her work on projects relating to child protection, welfare reform, and community resident involvement in the collection and use of information for community initiatives.

Between 1989 and 1997, Ms. Kot worked for Legal Services in California—first as a staff attorney and later as a managing attorney. She provided legal assistance to low income persons both as individuals and in class actions. Veronika specialized in advocacy in the areas of welfare and housing rights.

Ms. Kot holds a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree from the University of California at Berkeley, and a B.A. from the University of Chicago.

Charles Bruner serves as Executive Director of the Child and Family Policy Center, a nonprofit organization established in 1989 "to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families."

Through the Child and Family Policy Center, Bruner provides technical assistance to states, communities, and foundations on activities of the federally-established national Center for Service Integration. He has written widely on public policy approaches to the development of more comprehensive, community-based responses to children, family, and neighborhood needs. Bruner served twelve years as a state legislator in Iowa.

Dr. Bruner holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University and received his B.A. from Macalester College.

The Child and Family Policy Center gratefully acknowledges the support and funding of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the production of this publication. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

CHAPTER 1
Community Involvement in Information Collection, Analysis and Use: A Summary of Interviews with Participants and Professionals

Knowledge is power.

Freedom of the press is for those who own one.

The ability to collect, interpret, and use information to inform change is essential to comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs). Information can create awareness of the need for action, focus attention on areas of particular concern, identify resources that can help address those concerns, design strategies for change, and assess the impact of those strategies on producing that change.

CCIs often have required communities to conduct needs assessments, develop resource maps or inventories, and establish outcome objectives and measures. Too often, however, these assessments have been done at or to, rather than with and for, disinvested neighborhoods. Moreover, there often has been little attention given to enabling neighborhood residents to collect information or to make effective use of the information that is collected.

Still, there are a number of efforts around the country that have sought to develop better partnerships with neighborhoods in developing and using information and data systems to guide comprehensive community change. Some uses of data by neighborhood residents have been indigenous, but others have been the result of new partnerships between outside organizations and neighborhood residents and their organizations. Foundations have financed a number of the latter efforts.

This paper draws upon some of these efforts and experiences in supporting neighborhood participation in data collection, analysis, and use. It is based upon twenty-nine telephone interviews completed by Veronika Kot or Charles Bruner from April through June of 1998. Interviewees included researchers and evaluators who have worked with neighborhood residents in data development and analysis, organizers and staff of community-based organizations who have assisted neighborhood residents and community-based organizations in data development and analysis, and neighborhood leaders who have collected and used data in community-building efforts.

Interviewees were asked to respond to four general issues:

▲ their knowledge of work and models that had helped neighborhood residents become effective collectors and users of data;

▲ their understanding of the findings from data collection that have been helpful in moving community-building agendas forward;

▲ their recommendations regarding the strategies and types of support from foundations and other outside groups that can effectively enlist residents in this work; and

▲ their knowledge of other people and resources, particularly neighborhood residents, that have valuable experiences and perspectives on this issue.

This document summarizes the varied perspectives that interviewees expressed regarding the involvement of neighborhood residents in data collection and use. Chapter 2 describes some of the specific tools that have

Outside "experts" and professionals should not set agendas for the community.

been employed and have proved effective in supporting neighborhood collection, use, and analysis of information to drive reform. In short, this chapter represents the "how" of engaging neighborhood residents while Chapter 2 represents the "what."

Professional and Neighborhood Relationships: Different Perspectives on Roles, Agreement on Control

The issue that interviewees generally found the most challenging to address related to the degree to which neighborhood residents could and should take control over data collection and analysis and the degree to which this was a role that outside professionals could or should assume.

There was general agreement among all persons interviewed that whether the project involves data collection or a much broader community initiative or both, outside "experts" and professionals should not set agendas for the community, but should instead assume the role of convener, facilitator, and provider of resources and technical assistance. Beyond this, however, perspectives differed.

Relationship Between Data "Experts" and Communities. There were several different perspectives on the relationships and partnerships that might be developed between outside data experts and neighborhood residents and organizations.

One view, most commonly expressed by the outside experts who were interviewed, was that community residents cannot usually be expected to become "number crunchers," at least not to the same extent as university or professionally trained data analysts. Some data analysis tasks, particularly those involving statistical analyses or manipulation of large data sets, should be performed by those who are good at number crunching. The way to involve neighborhood residents is to provide training to assist them with understanding how to think about data and information, how to formulate questions, where to look for information within the community, and how to develop long-term relationships with those professional data analysts, with residents in a guiding role.

One role an outside foundation can play is to help residents improve their relationships with local data holders (such as city, police department, health department) by using the foundation's influence with such data holders to bring them to the table and discuss how their data can be made more accessible. This approach envisions an ongoing relationship or partnership between the community and the professional data experts and providers outside the community (such as foundations, universities, and think tanks), as well as the traditional data collectors within the community (agencies, local governments).

A second perspective, most commonly expressed by community-based organization (CBO) leaders, stressed the ultimate goal of transferring information expertise into the community through training and resources provided initially by an external source working closely with the community. "Community" in this context includes the CBO as the agent of the neighborhood that ultimately develops and

Neighborhood residents may be particularly skilled at uncovering information that is qualitative and asset-based rather than quantitative.

uses this expertise. CBO capacity will vary from community to community depending on the relative sophistication of its service providers. The training required from outside sources will vary accordingly.

One variation of this approach is for the community to hire its own data expert, someone who could be a trained community member. Potential sources of training and expertise within the neighborhood (such as community colleges) might also be developed. The neighborhood may no longer need to rely on outside experts; however, it will continue to rely on newly developed or strengthened "internal" experts (e.g. community colleges, CBOs).

While there is a strong emphasis upon community-based organizations as the institutional base for this data expertise, this does not mean that some neighborhood residents, with education and training, cannot themselves become expert data analysts and experts. As one person interviewed indicated, only a tiny proportion of the public as a whole gets excited about data and number-crunching. It is no different in disinvested neighborhoods. If the goal is to find and cultivate people from within neighborhoods to use SPSS programs and run regression analyses, it will require hunting around for the person with such inclination. Such individuals can be found and their skills developed, but they are much more likely to be enlisted and supported through community-based organizations than through outside institutions.

Some researchers cautioned that while CBOs may go a long way towards assuming many of the data collection abilities of experts, more complex analytical and design issues may require a level of expertise that is too costly and too difficult for most CBOs. It may be more cost-effective to hire outside consultants or to continue cultivating relationships with other outside experts for more complicated research needs.

A third perspective, shared by most of the neighborhood leaders and community organizers who were interviewed, stressed the value of grassroots, resident involvement in data collection. They saw information gathering, analysis, and use as a learning and empowerment tool as much as an analytic product, one that did not necessarily require outside guidance and direction.

Traditional data is available from agencies and professional data collectors, and experts exist who can analyze it and develop dissertations about it, but if the goal is to involve residents in actual data collection, the whole point of information gathering may be different. Neighborhood residents may be particularly skilled at uncovering information that is qualitative and asset-based rather than quantitative. This kind of information may not meet the kinds of strict statistical controls (e.g. random sampling) utilized in other data collection and may thus, by nature, be less "expert-dependent."

Several people interviewed who stressed this approach cited prior bad experiences with outside experts coming into their communities to collect data and warned against "professionals taking over" and devaluing and disempowering residents in the process. They also generally expressed faith that, over time, residents would acquire the tools they needed to use data to press for needed community

Surveys of residents by residents may be most appropriate where the goal is to determine local community needs and desires and to mobilize the community to support them.

change, if not for producing publishable articles for academic journals.

These different perspectives are not necessarily irreconcilable nor mutually exclusive (although they sometimes indicated strong philosophical differences). It is possible for a community to undertake a variety of approaches simultaneously or to choose among them, depending on the type of data most appropriate for a particular purpose. For example, surveys of residents by residents may be most appropriate where the goal is to determine local community needs and desires and to mobilize the community to support them. A quick printout of data by an outside expert may be the best approach where a specific statistic, particularly one which compares neighborhood data against other neighborhoods, is needed for a grant application or to support or oppose particular legislation. An outside policy think tank may be the best resource for a synthesis of existing national research on best practices in early childhood development or youth crime prevention, when such information is needed to supplement a community planning process. Regular data updates compiled by local agencies, colleges, and CBOs may be ideally suited for tracking neighborhood trends over time, including crime, health status or child care availability in order to assist residents and CBOs in planning and self-evaluation.

In fact, the Interfaith Education Fund model combines all three approaches to information and data collection. The Education Fund itself is a traditional policy, research and technical assistance organization. It collects and disseminates information and assists communities through training. The organizations the Fund works with are community based organizations and they conduct their own simultaneous research on a neighborhood level by talking to residents in small groups in order to identify common neighborhood concerns. At the most grassroots level, neighborhood residents assume leadership roles on issues of interest to them and go out in teams of two or three to research potential solutions to the problems identified by the community organizations.

The Neighborhoods Indicator Project and the Piton Foundation in Denver also are undertaking a major shift away from the traditional outside-expert-as-consultant-to-the-community approach. Their new approach is to focus on strengthening the capacity of community-based intermediary organizations so that these organizations can become the immediate sources of information for their communities and so that they are able to collect, analyze, and use data more independently. In turn, these organizations draw upon neighborhood leadership as data collectors and analysts. Piton envisions that it will remain involved, but in a role rendered nearly invisible to the grassroots, because most of its contact will be with intermediaries.

Agreement on Who Defines and Develops the Agenda. While expressing different perspectives on how to approach the actual data collection and analysis, all interviewees stressed that information collection and "data initiatives" must be relevant to community goals and integrated into an action agenda.

Information alone may bring people together, but it won't keep them together in the absence of clear goals and actions in support of which it is used.

Training of residents regarding access to, collection, analysis, and use of data should be integrated into other training or specific action goals so that its relevance is apparent. Information alone may bring people together, but it won't keep them together in the absence of clear goals and actions in support of which it is used. Clear action items should be available from the very beginning, so that people don't feel "it's all talk." One interviewee commented that men, in particular, will drop out unless quickly provided with opportunities for action.

On a related note, all stressed that there needs to be a commitment to involving residents from the very beginning of a project in defining what is going to be done and how, in the implementation of those decisions and in their evaluation. In this way, information collection and use by residents will flow naturally from and be integrated into a larger community action agenda. One example that came up over and over in the context of information gathering was that neighborhood residents should be involved in deciding what the community needs to find out, how the survey instrument (or other tool) should be designed, how the information will be collected, and how it will be used. Community involvement also should include regular debriefings on what is being found. For example, community meetings can be used to involve residents in discussions of the most pressing community issues, the unknowns which surround these issues, and the questions that could be raised to discover the answers. Resident committees could draft or comment on drafts of surveys. Additional community meetings could be convened for the purposes of disseminating and discussing the information discovered and for deciding what that information means for the community and how best to use it. Likewise, input at both ends of the process could be sought through CBOs, churches, and other existing neighborhood organizations.

On a different note, commentators who are researchers themselves emphasized the need for balance in power-sharing in agenda setting, so that the professionals' expertise can be fully utilized and community input maximized simultaneously. The tension between the role of the resident and the "outsider" needs to be resolved in a balanced and realistic way.

Outside experts can bring to the table a level of objectivity and broader knowledge or experience (including experience with other initiatives) which may be lacking within the community. Making use of these assets may at times require expressing views or pushing in directions not articulated by the community. An outside expert is valuable precisely because he or she can encourage the community to think of new directions and new approaches. It would be a disservice to the community for researchers to fail to offer the expertise they do have.

In addition to technical expertise, an outside expert can assist the community both in articulating research goals and in recognizing and understanding the value of particular kinds of research for particular purposes. Once the research goals and general means of reaching them are determined by the community, the researcher can assist residents to "think like a researcher," i.e. to recognize how to measure things consistently and thoroughly and to understand why systematic approaches are required.

The process itself should be valued and understood as part of community change and growth, from residents as passive receivers of information to active participants and initiators.

It also is the responsibility of the expert to warn residents if their plans to set up research or evaluation projects contain defects which are likely to jeopardize the success or credibility of the outcomes. Experts should propose alternative approaches and explain the feasibility of certain goals.

Researchers also felt strongly it sometimes is unrealistic, and may even be undesirable, to expect outside funders, such as foundations, to allow communities to design their evaluation approaches without taking into consideration the evaluation needs and expectations of the funders. These researchers emphasized that it is desirable for foundations to be responsive to community research goals and needs while also taking into account their own evaluation requirements.

Nurturing the Process: The Importance of Relationship Building

A point of consensus among interviewees was that developing community capacity to collect, analyze, understand and use information takes lots of patience and time and cannot be rushed. It is a process, not an overnight event. It frequently takes more time to have community members design instruments and gather information than it would for "experts" to do so. At the same time, it is a learning process and one which develops community ownership and capacity. For this reason, the process itself should be valued and understood as part of community change and growth, from residents as passive receivers of information to active participants and initiators.

The process will require significant work and effort. A lot of door-to-door work is useful initially. Particularly at the beginning of information or data projects, there will be a need for close and intensive work with the outside foundation or data expert in order to develop community skills. One person suggested that there should be an on-site person dedicated to this goal or at least available on-site a few days per week.

Of paramount importance for neighborhood residents is that outside organizations treat residents with respect, as equal partners, and not attempt to "take over." They should understand that residents are interested in information, they want to make good decisions, and they want to know what works. Nobody wants to be involved in a course of action that is ineffective.

When outside experts come into communities, they need to spend the time necessary to get to know the neighborhood, understand its leadership and power structures, conduct door-to-door outreach, and generally lay the groundwork for any ensuing project by becoming familiar with the site.

When an outside organization, such as a foundation, begins working with a community, it is essential that it do so by building on existing organizations and leadership, that it gain "an invitation into the neighborhood." In general, interviewees agreed that it takes more time and work to build a neighborhood capacity for data collection, analysis, and use than currently can be provided by existing neighborhood leadership.

Neighborhood organizations and leaders, if properly engaged, can then be asked to "grow themselves" by bringing in other residents to

The best means of securing initial interest is to work through respected organizations and leaders who have some pulse of the community and can bring out participants.

participate. One person suggested that one way of involving local residents who are not usually vocal and visible is to ask the leaders of various organizations or churches to send to a meeting two individuals from that organization's constituency.

Interviewees cited a number of "lessons learned" in fostering neighborhood interest and participation, including the following:

▲ The best incentives to participation are to insure that the issues are ones which are near and dear to residents and that the information is relevant to those issues.

▲ The best means of securing initial interest is to work through respected organizations and leaders who have some pulse of the community and can bring out participants.

▲ When inviting people to learn about or participate in the work, make the meetings attractive events, providing food and refreshments and providing child care.

▲ Give recognition for the hard work involved, including certificates, awards, T-shirts, and celebrations of incremental achievements.

▲ Hold meetings, trainings, and events at a time and place convenient for residents, not professionals. Transportation and safety issues should be taken into consideration.

▲ Consider providing stipends for participation in surveys, both to interviewers and interviewees. Especially in instances where professionals get paid to participate, neighborhood participants should be offered similar compensation, or it may send the message that they are not as valued as the professional. Compensation may be needed to involve people who would not otherwise volunteer, although it is important not to create schisms within the neighborhood, because many community organizers are volunteering their time already.

▲ Involve youth in the process. Youth represent a particularly promising resource for grassroots data collection and analysis. They have time and enthusiasm to tackle new challenges, connections to get others involved, know the street language (particularly around youth concerns), and are not computer-phobic. Moreover, they often are very malleable in pursuing new activities and acquiring new skills. Some can become excited about crunching numbers. Finally, when youth acquire such analytic skills, it opens new educational and career doors for them as they move to adulthood.

▲ Provide compensation where compensation is due. Designating and paying individuals to take on the responsibility of data collection analysis for a neighborhood is crucial when that data collection and analysis is to be a sustained part of an initiative. Volunteers will not have the time to do this adequately while working and managing their lives and families. Neighborhood residents and CBO members can be hired, which provides an additional flow of dollars and skills into the neighborhood, thereby increasing neighborhood human and economic capital. However, in providing compensation

Foundations have the ability to bring people to the table, to demystify processes, and to build and maintain momentum. They often have access to individuals and organizations that neighborhood residents cannot reach, or do not feel will respond to them.

to such individuals, it is essential that compensation decisions be made in conjunction with the community to minimize the problems that can occur in a very poor community where a few persons suddenly are provided with income by an outsider. Indeed, even community input and approval may not guarantee that the compensation issue will not lead to tensions.

▲ Researchers should be sensitive to issues of confidentiality. Involving residents in data collection may help residents open up and provide information to their peers. If the information is personal in nature or if there is distrust or hostility within the community, however, the opposite may be true. Researchers need to be familiar with community divisions and problems in order to minimize their impact on the research work. Moreover, thorough training of community researchers in the importance of maintaining confidentiality is also critical to building trust and thus improving access to quality information.

The What and the How: Defining the Foundation Role

Interviewees had a number of recommendations to make to foundations regarding their role in supporting neighborhood residents in data collection, analysis, and use. These related both to specific services and supports that foundations could provide to neighborhood residents and to the manner in which they should approach neighborhoods and neighborhood leadership.

Specific Services and Supports. Interviewees generally felt that foundations could play important roles in supporting residents in data collection and use. The following were among the specific services and supports that foundations could provide that might not otherwise be available to residents:

▲ *Facilitation.* Foundations have the ability to bring people to the table, to demystify processes, and to build and maintain momentum. They often have access to individuals and organizations that neighborhood residents cannot reach, or do not feel will respond to them.

▲ *Hardware and Software.* Foundations can purchase or lease computer and other equipment and computer software for neighborhood organizations, or provide grants for that purpose. Even when neighborhood organizations are supported by grants and outside funds, it often is for specific services and does not include flexible funds that build organizational capacity to manage information and data.

▲ *Training.* Foundations can provide or make available training in data collection, analysis, and use. This may include basic computer skills training and training on how to use the Internet, as well as training on data analysis and operating SPSS programs. Foundations often can enlist consultants and trainers who can provide specific guidance in how to use information for planning purposes and how to market findings to achieve results. Finally, foundations can support the interests identified by neighborhood residents in developing

Consultants, experts, and foundation officers need to believe in the ability of neighborhood residents to take on challenging tasks.

knowledge and skills, which may include training to understand government structures or leadership training.

▲ *Community retreats and reflections.* Foundations can create "time and space" for reflection and for reassessment. Foundations can support and facilitate retreats that clarify goals, reassess plans, and celebrate successes, which may not be possible without outside support.

▲ *Linking and supporting evaluation efforts and activities.* Foundations can provide opportunities for data users in the community to support one another and share their work. Foundations also can encourage new efforts by providing support for independent evaluators and consultants. Several interviewees, however, stressed that foundations should look to involving neighborhood residents in the process by which any outside evaluators are selected. Doing so may require training neighborhood residents in what to ask and realistically expect of potential evaluators. This can assure community members are not taken in by over-promising and other misleading tactics on the part of potential evaluators vying for contracts.

▲ *Developing the field.* Foundations can be translators of "best practices" and supporters of innovative approaches and solutions. In these activities, foundations can play a valuable role by insuring that the products and services developed are both "user friendly" and available at the neighborhood level.

Approach. Interviewees indicated that the manner in which outside consultants, experts, and foundation officers approached neighborhoods was as important as the services and supports they offered. The disposition and orientation of the people who worked with neighborhoods were seen as critical to building an effective relationship. Interviewees identified the following skills and qualities that foundations should seek for those working within neighborhoods.

▲ *Respect and appreciation for neighborhood leadership.* Consultants, experts, and foundation officers need to believe in the ability of neighborhood residents to take on challenging tasks. Several interviewees described horror stories of people from the outside coming into neighborhoods with condescending and paternalistic approaches to helping, with a complete lack of understanding of and appreciation for the strengths within the neighborhood.

▲ *A listening focus.* Interviewees stressed that the best role of the outside expert was to assist neighborhood residents and organizations to pursue the neighborhood's agenda, not for the expert to pursue his or her, or a foundation's, agenda. This requires both listening skills and a willingness to adapt one's own thinking to the neighborhood.

▲ *Honesty.* Interviewees also stressed the need for outside experts to be up-front about what they can and cannot provide. If foundations set parameters around the expert's role, this must be clear from the outset.

Outside experts need to be willing and able to bridge the distance between their training and expertise and the real-life expertise in the neighborhood.

▲ *Thinking outside academic boxes.* One interviewee stressed that neighborhood residents want tangible results, something that they can use. Often, outside experts trained in data collection and analysis think in terms of research reports and scholarly standards of proof rather than concrete results for neighborhoods. An example of tangible and usable data obtained by one CBO concerned comparisons of spending data in various school districts, indicating that a particular school district in a low-income area was targeted for disproportionate funding cuts. This information was then used to advocate for increased and more equitable funding.

▲ *Common sense language.* The role of the outside expert is not to employ arcane language or to impress others with his or her knowledge. Rather, it is to provide practical advice and guidance. In many instances, this requires demystifying the language used in research and evaluation and employing terms that people can understand and use. Still, it may also require training residents to understand fundamental research terms.

In general, interviewees believed that outside experts do exist who can build relationships and partnerships with the community. As the observations listed above imply, however, this requires that those experts be flexible and adaptive. Outside experts need to be willing and able to bridge the distance between their training and expertise and the real-life expertise in the neighborhood — to recognize that this is a learning agenda and opportunity not only for the neighborhood, but for themselves as well.

List of Interviewees

Terry Bailey, Piton Foundation

John Bugy, Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, Louisville

Marno Batterson, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Claudia Coulton, Case Western Reserve University

Rebecca Curzon, Lotus Development Corporation

Gloria Cross, Community Action Information Network

Sandra Durham, Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, Jacksonville

Eliza Earle, Asset Based Community Development Institute

Patrice Flynn, Flynn and Associates

Henry Izumizaki, Urban Strategies Council

Charlotte Kahn, The Boston Foundation

Tom Kingsley, Urban Institute

Hnin-Hnin Ko, Boston Poverty Project

Angela Kwelele, Oakland Enterprise Zone Policy Board

Carrie Loughlin, Interfaith Education Fund

Anthony Leach, Oakland Community Health Academy

Jackie Moore, Chapin Hall Center for Children

Sarah Morrison, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Richard Murphy, Academy for Educational Development

Marilyn Ondrosik, Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition

Richard Pargament, Metis and Associates

Susan Philliber, Philliber and Associates

Ron Register, Cleveland Community Building Initiative

Jason Sachs, Boston Early Childhood Quality Improvement Project

David Scheie, Rainbow Research Group

Fran Schorr, Metis and Associates

Ada Skyles, Chapin Hall Center for Children

Gary Walker and staff, Public / Private Ventures

Shelly Yanoff, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Families

CHAPTER 2
Different Needs, Different Strategies: Elements of a Toolkit for Resident-Led Information Collection and Use

There is a rich array of examples of neighborhood residents taking leadership in using data to further neighborhood goals, often with outside help and support. While not all neighborhood residents can or should be expected to be interested or expert in data analysis, experience suggests that residents with proclivities for this work can be identified, recruited, and assisted in acquiring needed analytic skills. In addition to producing useful analysis that can further neighborhood goals and agendas, enlisting residents can serve to engage communities, provide employment opportunities, and help individuals acquire skills and sometimes develop new career pathways.

The following loosely categorizes different successful tools that community residents have employed to collect, analyze, and use information to further their reform efforts. They are:

- ▲ community monitoring of grants, programs, and policies
- ▲ participatory, empowerment, and self-evaluation
- ▲ resident surveys, views, and visions
- ▲ service, resource, and asset mapping
- ▲ youth mapping
- ▲ demographic profiling
- ▲ issue driven data collection
- ▲ policy advice and support
- ▲ involvement in and control over evaluation design

Each is described briefly, followed by selected case illustrations and possible sources for more information on the details of undertaking such efforts.

▲ Community Monitoring of Grants, Programs, and Policies. In the 1970s, the Center for Community Change and others helped train neighborhood residents in "citizen monitoring" of community development grant funds coming into the community. ACORN and other groups have helped neighborhood residents examine bank lending patterns in order to make use of the federal Community Reinvestment Act. Training and technical assistance in records research, spread sheet analysis, and review of technical reports can enable residents to oversee and insure that their legal rights are protected, that funds are used for the intended purpose, and to evaluate performance in terms of real results.

Case Illustrations

The National Citizens' Monitoring Project on Community Development Block Grants involved over 80 local groups in monitoring the implementation of block grants in 43 cities. The project was funded by a Title IX grant. Its goal was to help community groups monitor and evaluate local level performance. The Center for Community Change was the fiscal agent for the project and also played a leadership role in the coalition of local organizations involved in the project (see appendix for additional information on the Center for Community Change).

The National EZ/EC Learning Initiative is intended to monitor and measure the impact of the federal EZ/EC program and to involve community representatives in that monitoring.

Enlisting residents can serve to engage communities, provide employment opportunities, and help individuals acquire skills and sometimes develop new career pathways.

Possible Sources for Information

Andrew Mott, Center for Community Change (202) 342-0567

▲ **Participatory, Empowerment, and Self-Evaluation.** Participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation, and self-evaluation all have been developed as new approaches to evaluation that work with those who are involved in program or initiative development, rather than remaining external to the process. Some of these evaluation approaches have directly involved neighborhood residents and consumers of services in the evaluation process, usually with outside help.

Case Illustrations

The Clark Community Partnerships for Protecting Children Initiative, intended to improve child protection services in a number of sites, includes a self-evaluation component at the grassroots level. Workgroups composed largely of parents and residents are developing self-evaluation work plans in cooperation with the child protective service system, information and referral agencies and resource centers and with the assistance of outside entities. The Jacksonville, Florida site is furthest along in this process, and is working with the University of Southern Florida.

Possible Sources for Information

Sarah Morrison, Center for the Study of Social Policy (202) 371-1565

Lynn Usher, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (919) 962-6496

▲ **Resident Surveys, Views and Visions.** It is common to conduct resident surveys in order to assess community needs. Involving residents in the survey process can produce results that move beyond surveys to engaging the community. Moreover, interviewers gain skills and understanding that enable them to become more powerful spokespersons for their community needs and hopes.

Case Illustrations

The Common Square Health Center in Boston conducts a survey of residents by residents every two years in order to measure community priorities and concerns. This survey is then used as a planning tool for the Center's focus and activities during the next two years. Most of the persons conducting the survey are community residents or residents of nearby communities. Surveying is conducted in several languages.

The Urban Strategies Council in Oakland worked to train residents to conduct surveys of residents for purposes of the City's Empowerment Zone application.

The Interfaith Education Fund in the Southwest is a technical support organization for member organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation. These organizations in turn are composed of member organizations such as faith organizations, unions, or schools. Local organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation obtain community input by conducting informal "house meetings" of community residents in order to gain insight into local concerns. Once

Recently, there has been a great deal of interest in mapping informal community resources and assets, as well as service providers.

community concerns are distilled through this process, local research is done by small groups of residents with a particular interest in the identified issues. These processes, while less formal than typical focus groups and surveys, are nonetheless effective in discovering community views and in engaging community residents in the collection of information about their communities.

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition in Bridgeport, Connecticut, worked with parents to help gather information from other parents through focus groups about the nature of parents' most pressing concerns as they relate to education. The results of these focus groups were then used to construct a survey of candidates for the school board.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative included a survey of residents, conducted by Metis Associates. The sites had input into the survey instrument, and neighborhood residents were hired as resident surveyors.

Possible Sources for Information

Henry Izumizaki, Urban Strategies Council (510) 893-2404

Carrie Loughlin, Interfaith Education Fund (512) 459-6551

Marilyn Ondrosik, Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (203) 368-4291

Richard Pargament and Frann Schorr, Metis Associates (212) 425-8833

▲ Service, Resource, and Asset Mapping. Volunteers commonly have been enlisted to identify the range of community services and resources in a community, often to prepare resource lists for persons who may seek services. These efforts can focus on specific concerns such as child care or more general concerns such as human service providers. Recently, there has been a great deal of interest in mapping informal community resources and assets, as well as service providers. This can include both individuals and community resources such as parks, libraries, and coffee shops.

Case Illustrations

The United Way and Community Chest of Greater Cincinnati established the Institute for Community Capacity Building at Xavier University to train residents and community organizations in asset mapping. They have helped residents in different neighborhoods secure funding for specific asset mapping applications.

John McKnight and John Kretzmann from the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University have developed tools and strategies for asset mapping, as well as providing technical assistance to communities interested in doing asset mapping.

Possible Sources for Information

John McKnight and John Kretzmann, Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research (708) 491-3394

▲ **Youth Mapping.** Youth have energy, the ability to enlist friends, free time, willingness to try new approaches, and an ease and comfort with computers and technical matters. The experiences of the Academy for Educational Development in supporting youth in mapping their communities has shown the power of engaging youth in the types of asset and service mapping described above, although most likely to be focussed upon specific youth issues.

Case Illustrations

The Oakland Child Health and Safety Initiative and the Robert Wood Johnson application both involved youth in information gathering. Sixty young people participated in creating a survey and interview instrument, were trained and went out to conduct 700 interviews. The interviews focused on youth visions, views, and services. Subsequently, 200 youth mapped neighborhoods block by block to note what services are available, and what businesses are youth-friendly.

Safe and Sound in Baltimore has been involved in youth mapping. Last year 180 youth mappers compiled general neighborhood information. This year, they have been following up by phone and will soon be hitting the streets to obtain more in-depth information.

Clear Lines in Cedar Rapids enlisted a diverse group of middle- and high-school youth to gather youth perspectives on smoking, training the youth in research tools and techniques, including survey instrument development and analysis. Youth shared these results broadly with the community.

The Center for Youth Development in Washington, D.C., employs youth mapping as part of its multi-prong strategy to bring about the prioritizing of resources for youth in communities with which it is partnering. The Center has developed software and other materials for organizing information.

Possible Sources for Information

Henry Izumizaki, Urban Strategies Council, Oakland (510) 893-2404

Martha Holleman and Hathaway Ferabee, Safe and Sound, Baltimore (410) 528-0305

Richard Murphy, Director, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and Vice President, the Academy for Educational Development (202) 884-8267

▲ **Demographic Profiling.** There are fewer examples of residents themselves profiling their own neighborhoods through use of census tract and administrative data. Residents often have a distrust of data collection that seems designed simply to "record their miseries." Moreover, demographic profiling may require large databases which are difficult or impractical for community organizations and individuals to compile and manipulate without outside assistance. Still, constructing baseline information is essential for charting progress and for making the case for investment. Many communities succeed in compiling this information through partnerships with outside institutions which have the capacity for analyzing large databases. Other efforts at demographic profiling involve the training and/

Increasingly user-friendly software is making it easier for community organizations and residents to begin compiling baseline data about their communities.

or hiring of data experts to work directly for the community. Finally, increasingly user-friendly software is making it easier for community organizations and residents to begin compiling — or at least using more independently — baseline data about their communities.

Case Illustrations

The National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP) is a prime example of demographic profiling. The Urban Institute is working with organizations in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Oakland and Providence to compile large data bases of neighborhood-level data for the express purpose of making it available to communities to meet their needs. In all instances, the entities involved have large data capacity and work directly with communities, emphasize community use of information and action-related use of information. The collection and manipulation of information rests largely with the outside organizations, however.

The Data Warehouse is a large database in Savannah, established by Metis and Associates. It is easily updated, user friendly and includes a number of on-line tools for data manipulation. Thus, people without much formal education can learn to use it without the continued assistance of an outside entity.

The Neighborhood Balance Sheet is a program approach used by Rainbow Research Group which draws on available information from sources such as census data, housing data, planning agencies, etc., in order to identify the flow of money. It thus assembles information about a neighborhood's economy and can be a powerful and persuasive tool. Although less participatory than other models, it is usually developed and applied at the request of and with input from local organizations.

Possible Sources for Information

Tom Kingsley, The Urban Institute
(202) 857-8585

Claudia Coulton, Case Western Reserve
(216) 368-2304

Charlotte Kahn, Boston Children and Families Database, The Boston Foundation
(617) 723-7415

Terry Bailey, Piton Foundation, Denver
(303) 825-6246

Richard Pargament and Stan Schneider of Metis and Associates (212) 425-8833

David Scheie, Rainbow Research Group
(612) 824-0724

▲ **Issue Driven Data Collection.** In many instances, neighborhood groups identify issues they believe need to be addressed and about which they feel they need additional information to make the case for reform. These can be quite specific, such as the need for a street light, the higher cost of food in neighborhood stores than suburban supermarkets, or the access to public transportation. At times, outside assistance can help residents develop efficient and credible

Outside assistance can help residents develop efficient and credible strategies to collect, analyze and present information that can be individually tailored to a neighborhood group's specific interests.

strategies to collect, analyze and present information that can be individually tailored to a neighborhood group's specific interests and needs. At other times, outside help can assist by training residents and community organizations to obtain and manipulate such information.

Case Illustrations

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) in Bridgeport, Connecticut works with parents on a number of issues, primarily dealing with education. In one example of issue driven information gathering for use by residents, BCAC studied the city budget in detail after the mayor proposed greatly reducing the education budget. It prepared fact sheets which parents then used in City Council meetings, to write OpEd pieces and to mobilize other parents. The strategy was successful in increasing the school appropriation.

The Information Infrastructure Project at Chapin Hall, at the University of Chicago is funded by the MacArthur Foundation. It works with several communities on issues identified by the communities. For instance, one community wanted to know about youth employment and another about youth who were falling through the cracks of service agencies. The Project is working with the communities to create surveys of agencies, youth and service providers to identify resources, needs and problems in these areas.

The Piton Foundation (also part of the NNIP) is transforming its role from that of a large data collector providing information to neighborhoods into more of a supportive role as it trains neighborhood-based organizations to increasingly take over data collection and direction. The Foundation will remain active and continue offering assistance, but residents will increasingly turn to the intermediary organizations for assistance.

Various community organizing groups, including the Industrial Areas Foundation and ACORN, provide assistance to neighborhood residents in collecting information to make the case for change. Some of this work emerges organically. In Denver, for instance, a group of Latino women, frustrated by the program cutbacks in their children's schools, went to the school board to criticize the cuts and were told that cuts were occurring district-wide. They then went out and collected information from surrounding schools and counties showing that cuts were not occurring district-wide, which they presented at the next school board meeting.

Possible Sources for Information

Marilyn Ondrosik, Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (203) 368-4291

Ada Skyles and Jackie Moore, University of Chicago, Chapin Hall
(773) 753-3426 and (773) 753-2764

Terry Bailey, Piton Foundation, Denver
(303) 825-6246

▲ **Policy Advice and Support.** Neighborhood residents and coalitions can frequently benefit from broader policy research regarding useful models, innovative approaches and creative

Whether or not neighborhood residents are directly involved in the conduct of evaluation, they can exert control over the types of research and evaluation that go on in their neighborhoods.

solutions that have been used elsewhere. For instance, in formulating its employment strategies, a community may wish to know what approaches have proven particularly fruitful in other communities. This kind of research, like the data analysis discussed above, can be provided by an outside organization working closely with the community, or by area residents and CBOs trained in research by an outside organization, or by some combination of these approaches.

Case Illustrations

The Interfaith Education Fund integrates outside organization advice and engages communities in cooperative efforts to obtain policy information. Thus, the fund does broad policy research for communities which have identified such research questions. At the same time, the community residents conduct local research into the same issues.

Possible Sources for Information

Carrie Loughlin, Interfaith Education Fund (512) 459-6551

▲ **Involvement in and Control Over Evaluation Design.** Whether or not neighborhood residents are directly involved in the conduct of evaluation, they can exert control over the types of research and evaluation that go on in their neighborhoods. This can include establishing parameters for research designs, including how neighborhood residents are enlisted in the process and how issues of race, class and power are addressed.

Case Illustrations

The St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium (STICC) in New Orleans, Louisiana, has established a written set of principles — undoing racism, inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity, collaboration, stewardship, capacity-building, and organizational education — that those providing funding to the Consortium and its member organizations must honor. The Consortium also has established research and evaluation guidelines for persons interested in evaluating programs and systems in their neighborhoods. The guidelines include a process for reviewing and approving or denying research and evaluation requests.

Possible Sources for Information

Angela Winfrey, St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium, New Orleans (505) 595-5062

CHAPTER 3
At the Grassroots: Notes from a Meeting on Community Organizing and Information Collection and Use

On September 10th, 1998, eleven community activists met with Annie E. Casey Foundation staff and consultants for a facilitated discussion on what it takes, from a grassroots perspective, to involve neighborhood residents in data collection and analysis. The discussion was framed around several organizing questions. The community activists who participated in the discussion were:

Henry Izumizaki from Oakland, California, the Executive Director of Eureka Bay Area, an organization which develops nonprofit leaders through a two-year fellowship program.

Anthony G. Leach, a member of the Community Health Academy's health team in Oakland, California, where he serves as Community Development Specialist.

Marilyn Ondrosik, a longtime organizer currently working as the Director of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition.

Marta Calderon, the President of Parent Education and Resident Leadership, a citywide parent training and leadership organization in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Sue Simpson, a legislative intern with the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and board member of the Parent Education and Resident Leadership.

Shelia and Larry Wilson, from Bell County, Kentucky, the founders and staff persons of Appalachian Focus, an environmental community education and action organization.

Hathaway Ferebee the Project Director of the Safe and Sound Campaign in Baltimore, Maryland, and board member of the Community Law Center in Baltimore.

Derrick Chris Paige, a 17-year-old junior at Saint Frances Academy in East Baltimore and a participant in a number of youth organizations, including working as a staff member of Safe and Sound.

Bev Thomas, from Baltimore, a lifetime community activist in her Park Heights neighborhood as well as city wide.

Kathleen Davis from San Antonio, Texas, the Senior Organizer for the S.A. Communities Organized for Public Service and the Metro Alliance Organization.

Other participants at the meeting included **Stan Schneider** from Metis, Associates, who served as the facilitator. **Garland Yates** and **Cindy Guy** from the Annie E. Casey Foundation convened the meeting. **Charles Bruner** and **Veronika Kot** from the Child and Family Policy Center and **Ada Skyles** from the Chapin Hall Center for Children served as consultants to the Foundation.

Synopsis of Major Themes

A number of major themes emerged from the discussion. Perhaps the most frequently reiterated theme was that data collection and analysis must be integrated into community action and the agenda residents establish. It

Data collection will not and should not be seen as a compartmentalized activity by community residents. It must be relevant to the grassroots developmental activities and work.

will not, and should not, be seen as a compartmentalized activity by community residents. It must be relevant to the grassroots developmental activities and work. In addition, it should be viewed both as process and product. While the result may be better information about community conditions or answers to specific questions, the process is one of engaging residents and, through that process, building community capacity.

Closely related to this issue is the theme of supporting community organizing as an essential component in a community's ability to use information. Information collection, analysis and use can be a strong organizing tool. Given that only a few communities will be lucky enough to have outside data expert partners, building organizational capacity within the community is critical. Indeed, without strong organization even the best information is not likely to be used effectively by a community. Compensating community members for the roles they undertake is also important in this context, although caution must be exercised to do so with community input in order to minimize the tensions which may result in very poor communities when a few individuals are paid.

Involving youth early on and throughout the process is also important. Youth should be involved to make sure that agendas include their needs. Youth, once involved, can frequently bring in their families. Strategies need to be developed to ensure that there is room at the table for new and young voices, since it is common to see the same people at the table over and over, particularly where opportunities for participation remain limited.

Many of the community participants in the meeting emphasized the need for sensitivity by an outsider in dealing with the community. It is important for an outsider to make every effort to understand a community and learn about it, to be non-judgmental and culturally sensitive, to use non-demeaning language, and to take the time to build personal relationships with community members. An outside entity that wishes to assist the community should try to understand, catalogue and build on a community's assets, rather than focusing exclusively on its deficits. In addition, if real citizen involvement is a goal, it is important to create a variety of opportunities and levels for resident involvement. Finally, it is important to understand conflicts and not shy away from them where hard issues need to be faced and addressed, recognizing that it is not always possible to please everybody.

Meeting participants offered multiple strategies for obtaining information from reluctant sources. In at least some of these areas, an outside foundation was seen as a valuable resource. Some of the approaches included:

▲ identifying friendly leadership in the target agency in order to work towards greater information sharing;
▲ working through an intermediary organization with established credibility, one which will not sensationalize the findings;
▲ publicizing refusals to provide information;
▲ publicizing data collection efforts in advance in order to generate familiarity with and support for the efforts;

If you want to involve residents, interest has to start with residents. What do they want to achieve? What information do they need to get there? Whose agenda is this going to support?

▲ using neighborhood individuals with "door-opening" clout, such as school principals or pastors;

▲ involving youth since people are often more willing to open up if youth are involved;

▲ and being aware of internal conflicts within the community so as to avoid unnecessary antagonism between data gatherer and data provider.

The meeting participants also identified specific ways foundations can be helpful in promoting resident use of information. Foundations can act as facilitators to promote building relationships with and hence obtain information from government agencies and other sources. Foundations can provide communities with information about best practices and model programs. Foundations can support training on what information is needed to answer a neighborhood's questions, how to obtain and analyze the information, and how to use information in a democratic process, including how to translate data into message and policy. Finally, foundations can publicize community efforts and experiences more broadly, even nationally, to affect policy at a national level in the interests of low-income communities.

Remarks from Facilitated Discussion

The following paraphrases some of the points raised by participants in the free-flowing discussion around the general organizing question and specific subquestions.

Discussion Questions

It is clear that the ability to collect, interpret, and use information to inform change is essential to neighborhood transformation. Information is needed to create awareness of the need for action, to focus attention on areas of particular concern, to identify resources that can help address those concerns, to design strategies for change, and to assess the impact of those strategies on producing change. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the active participation of residents in the collection, interpretation, and use of information can have a positive impact on the neighborhood transformation process.

The critical question is: What can (or should) be done by outsiders to facilitate and expedite this participation? This question itself can be broken down into the following subquestions (under public will and participation, basic skills, access and infrastructure, and what works.)

▲ **Public Will and Participation.** *How does one develop and sustain residents' interest and belief in the importance of reliable information to support planning, management, evaluation, advocacy and policy development? What have been your experiences? How can an outsider (such as the foundation) enter productively into a relationship with community residents over the collection and use of information?*

Ferebee: If you want to involve residents, interest has to start with residents. What do they want to achieve? What information do they need to get there? Whose agenda is this going to support?

What information professionals want to get from a community is one thing; what the community wants and needs is another. The community is willing to participate, but only as equal partners.

Wilson (Larry): Most communities with problems have a wide range of problems; and many have been studied a lot. Interest in information has to come from the people and has to have a concrete outcome (what is it we're trying to achieve — how do we get there?), to be action-based. In addition, there needs to be a way to disseminate information to the entire community, including both residents and local decision-makers. This requires groundwork.

Thomas: There is a need to involve youth early on in the process. You need to know what their needs are from the beginning, so goals are established with their needs included. Often, youth involvement can lead to family involvement. Language is important, and it is best to use words like "coalition building" — it helps to break down barriers between groups and bring them together around priorities. Residents have to be able to "touch, feel or see an issue" so that it's real to them. Then, they will be willing to get involved.

Ondrosik: Especially at the beginning of a relationship, there are issues of urgency and timing, and both of these have to come out of the community. Sometimes there is a crisis issue, sometimes there is just a sense that things aren't good. The community has to ask for the assistance and be ready for it. It has to have some immediate application. If outsiders provide information when the timing is wrong, it will get buried and no one will pay attention or even remember that they have it.

Izumizaki: In many low-income communities people feel disengaged and feel they don't count, so they don't participate. When a new initiative starts, there may be new seats at the table. If there is only one table, however, people who get to the table are likely to stay there. New voices don't have access. The challenge is to increase the number of tables or number of places as the table. If you want to stimulate hope through venues for real participation and real results, there need to be strategies to expand the opportunities to participate to incorporate new young voices.

Davis: Participation begins with whatever you care about the most. The question is how to get people talking with each other about the things they have in common and how to move to action from there. The first step is to get people together to talk. Out of that come questions (what do we need to know about the issues we care about?). Outside organization can help through training on how to think (about what you need to know) and how to analyze information, but the questions need to come from the community. Also, there needs to be support for the training and development of organizers.

Leach: What information professionals want to get from a community is one thing; what the community wants and needs is another. Any information has to serve the community's interests and be owned by the community. The community does have an agenda and information you bring or help you offer has to serve that agenda. The community is willing to participate, but only as equal partners. The community needs to feel confident and hopeful about the process and feel they are respected.

Information collection and use have to be connected with organization-building — they drive each other. Training and technical assistance on information can't be separated out from organization building.

Calderon: What brings me to the table is that my voice is being heard. If you come to hear, understand, and respond to community interests as community people describe them — that's how you get people to participate.

Thomas: You need to be careful about language you use; e.g. "low-income" is better than "poor." The word "professional" can be problematic, if it is seen as denigrating "non-professional resident." There needs to be an understanding and sensitivity to how low-income residents got where they are and what they have to deal with. There is an undeclared war on low-income communities by agencies and by government. There is a tendency to blame parents. Instead, we need to understand the root causes of addiction, which can be devastating to the community.

Wilson (Larry): An important question is who has ownership of information, who decides how it will and won't be used. Is it residents or outside academics? Do you want community participation (more than just a monthly meeting where you report what you did), or just permission (not involvement)? Outsiders need to think about these questions and be really straight with residents about what they are willing to do. Those of us who have been around have seen outsiders come in and do the "shuffle," stating high hopes but not being around for the long haul.

Outsiders need to understand communication barriers: language, culture, and body language. They need to identify the differences; to know who's who in the community. They also need to appreciate that solutions can come from within the community. Often, outsiders spend too many resources looking for models and adapting them or trying to direct the way a community solves a problem. Sometimes, the answers are inside the community, and need to be brought out.

Outsiders often are put off by conflict and seek to avoid it. Outsiders shouldn't avoid conflict; instead, they should face the hard issues. Someone is always benefitting and will fight to keep their share of the power that exists in the status quo.

Ferebee: The collection of information itself is an organizing strategy. What information gets counted is an agenda issue since a community may find different things are important, things not usually valued as indicators. The way in which information is collected, analyzed, entered should provide for community jobs; the dollars associated with information collection should be spent in the community.

Ondrosik: Information collection and use have to be connected with organization-building — they drive each other. Training and technical assistance on information can't be separated out from organization building. Organization building needs to drive everything else.

Ultimately, only a few communities will be lucky enough to have relationships with an information expert. In most communities, it is community organizations that will have to become the "experts," and that means organization building.

Leach: There is always a laundry list of

problems. Outsiders must come with an attitude of looking at assets too, so you can build on them. Outsiders must come with a willingness to recognize and be flexible to incorporate what the community values.

Izumizaki: People learn by doing. They learn from peer support. They learn from experience and their own mistakes. If you want to expand community capacity to use information, you need to employ the "plan-do-review" approach:

- residents assess situation
- they plan what to do
- they do it
- they review what happened and learn from it

Outsiders must be willing to invest resources in solutions folks come up with themselves, so it will increase their own ability to plan-do-review. This means providing resources without being too judgmental, and being willing to fund mistakes as learning activities. It is important to provide stipends to get people involved; they can't afford it otherwise.

When the community owns the process, it becomes more relevant and can identify issues that outsiders would miss. Important community-owned indicators can evolve from community direction of the effort. "Do they deliver pizza in your neighborhood?" can be a real important question for communities to answer and open up dialogue and action. Outsiders should be open to such increments of improvement as getting pizza houses to deliver in the neighborhood.

Thomas: Sometimes you have to put faith in the fact that the community knows best. We had an experience where we wanted to give jobs to kids to do landscaping for the city. Funders loved the idea, but they balked at the component of making it into a business run by youth. Yet that was what really made it work. You have to give it a shot — this is the community vision. Once you develop real partnership with community, it will open up your mind to appreciate the creativity in the community.

Davis: In starting an initiative, you can't substitute information collection for organizing or start solely with gathering information. It must be used to serve the organizing. We were able to establish health clinics in schools. What made that happen was that parents and teachers organized themselves and persisted. Although collecting data was an important tool, the clinics wouldn't have happened without the organizing. The message is it must be a connected process. Use organizing to find out about and research problems; but then use the resulting information to strengthen organizing. Ultimately, it is about self transformation, building civic culture for the common good (rather than an individualized and materialistic approach).

Leach: This is developmental work. Youth wanted interracial get-togethers, so we sponsored camps with training on racism and sexism. These have been popular, have continued and have grown. Each year, last year's participants become this year's camp leaders.

You have to let the community decide how to dispense the resources you offer. You can create havoc in a very poor community by funding one or two people.

Ferebee: We can draw from outsiders for help. For instance, we have information about the condition of children. What we don't have is list of opportunities — we need to know what standard opportunity indicators are.

Wilson (Larry): Really, you have to let the community decide how to dispense the resources you offer. You can create havoc in a very poor community by funding one or two people. It should be a local decision and in some communities it is the policy not to accept money to work on volunteer projects. The point is, you have to let the community decide the nature of compensation from resources you offer.

Ondrosik: Community organizations are involved in strengthening families by reducing isolation through formal and informal networks. Participation builds leadership skills both for self-advocacy and on behalf of community. Community organizing needs to be supported; but it cannot be directed.

▲ **Basic skills.** *What are the skills that you have needed in order to collect, analyze, and use information? From your experience, how were those skills developed or acquired in your neighborhood? What training, support, or technical assistance might a foundation provide to assist neighborhood residents to obtain and develop the necessary skills?*

Calderon: The critical skills are communication, clarity, and sensitivity.

Leach: I would add empathy to that list.

Davis: I would emphasize leadership skills, skills of conversation. I think there are a number of democratic skills people need to have: negotiation, argument, listening, consensus building, and moving consensus towards action.

Wilson (Larry): You cannot overemphasize communication skills.

Paige: You have to know how to disseminate information in the community in a way that people will understand it. You also have to know how and why you are collecting it. When they mapped youth resources they included a section with more in-depth questions. People wanted to know why the questions were being asked and what the information was being used for.

Leach: People need to know how to balance the agendas in a room.

Simpson: People need to hear from people one on one and listen to what is being said. That gets better information than surveys.

Izumizaki: People need to know how to get information, how to disaggregate it by categories, how to distinguish the "BS quotient." People need to know what is meaningful to the community and what leads to action. It is too easy to get caught up in information collection to respond to other's agendas.

It always has to be kept in mind that the community has access to special kinds of data and insight that academics do not have access to.

Whoever is coming in to do a neighborhood assessment needs to have spirit, mission, a sense of humor, and real caring. They must not be judgmental.

Ondrosik: Communities would benefit from skill building that helps translate information into something meaningful: a message that can influence others, both inside and outside the community (i.e. how to use information in the democratic process).

Wilson (Larry): It is important not to get caught in the trap of fitting your information into what others want or expect. People have to know what they are using the information for and why it is important to collect it.

Davis: People can learn to improve their active research skills, i.e. skills that are directed towards outcomes and goals. For instance, it may be important to find out what kinds of jobs kids from the neighborhood who got educated and left are doing elsewhere to try to attract those jobs to your area so your educated youth do not have to leave.

Bruner: *How can outside groups help residents acquire skills that might make the information collected "credible" to others or simply make it more likely that residents will get the specific information they need to develop their agenda?*

Leach: It goes beyond skills. People need to have a real caring for the neighborhood and its residents.

Thomas: Whoever is coming in to do a neighborhood assessment needs to have spirit, mission, a sense of humor, and real caring. They must not be judgmental.

Wilson (Larry): People coming in need to take the time to assess where people are coming from and not make assumptions about their skills. This process may be time-consuming, but it helps break down barriers and assess goals. It also may get adversaries talking to one another.

Ondrosik: Outsiders seeking to provide help need to let the community know you come with resources that you are ready to share. They will ask for them if they know they are available, but often they do not know what you can provide. This requires that you integrate people into development of all processes, which also builds ownership. Outsiders need to offer their expertise in a sensitive way and build relationships face-to-face, offering assistance in ways that ring true.

Yates: *How can outsiders be data partners with the community? How can work in individual communities be built into a national agenda?*

Calderon: It is possible to work with a data partner, but the relationship has to be built upon trust. PEARL in Bridgeport is parent-driven, but it relies upon BCAC for some of its information and analysis, but it is a partnering relationship.

Skyles: Chapin Hall is a data partner with several local resident-driven initiatives. One of the real challenges we face is getting information from the data holders to the communities. How do we convert data holders into data providers? Sometimes, a data partner can be very helpful to the community in getting access to data sources about the community.

When people work together, they learn from one another. They may start working on an environmental issue, but that becomes a tool for learning through experience about other things, such as race relationships and economic needs.

Schneider: Sensitivity is critical in building these relationships.

Davis: We have partnered with academics and it has helped tremendously with policy when effectiveness gets measured. Once they plugged into data about what it takes to be self-sufficient, they managed to wake up city officials to the need for higher paying jobs.

On the national question, foundations could help our stories get out to the public to affect policy.

Ondrosik: Foundations can provide model programs, best practices so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Leach: It remains critically important to be non-judgmental and to have cultural sensitivity. In data collection, there is often a lot of emphasis on infrastructure and technical issues, but the process is equally important, the establishment of personal relationships.

Wilson (Shelia): When people work together, they learn from one another. They may start working on an environmental issue, but that becomes a tool for learning through experience about other things, such as race relationships and economic needs.

Paige: Young people often know more about what's going on in a community than anyone. Involving them may help get the best picture of community relations.

Thomas: We need to build people's participatory skills. When we have meetings using a flip chart and have people's words up where they can see them and then incorporate them into minutes, it gives people ownership and buy-in.

▲ **Access and Infrastructure.** *They say that "knowledge is power." It is not surprising that those with special knowledge may resist sharing that information (and power) with those who seek it. How have you gained access to and collected the information you have needed for planning, evaluation, and advocacy? What tools did you require in order to analyze and disseminate this information? How did you gain access to those tools? What might a foundation do to insure that neighborhood residents can get the information they need from the larger community and that they have access to the tools needed to analyze and use it?*

▲ **What works.** *Do you know of any specific programs or activities that might serve as models for neighborhoods that wish to develop their capacities to obtain and use information, particularly in their planning processes? What are the obstacles that they are likely to confront? How might they overcome them? What might a foundation do to stimulate the use or adaptation of successful practices?*

Skyles: I would like to ask the first question in the following way: *What are your experiences obtaining information from people or institutions outside your communities? How do you, in a timely way, find out about decisions being made that will impact the community so you can get involved?*

We have found that publicizing who refuses to provide data is very effective in getting it. As another strategy, we also ask legislators to ask for data.

Wilson (Larry): We look to local papers for information, including information on government activities, public notices, ads for positions. All these can alert us to coal mining issues.

Izumizaki: In order to start getting an institution to become a data provider, you need to identify some leadership in that institution that believes the data should be made available. You also need a primary recipient that won't sensationalize the data to use against you (although they may credibly and objectively distribute it to others for advocacy purposes.)

In Oakland, the Urban Strategies Council was such a partner. The Council also disaggregated data for use by community organizations.

Ondrosik: We have found that publicizing who refuses to provide data is very effective in getting it. As another strategy, we also ask legislators to ask for data, if it is not forthcoming otherwise. Sometimes you have to make tactical choices of whether or not to sensationalize.

Paige: When people see young people trying to make a difference, they often are more willing to cooperate.

Thomas: Publicizing upcoming data collection efforts through events such as speakouts can help.

Wilson (Larry): When you have community folks talking to community folks, you need to be aware of who is fighting with whom. Community researchers need to be compensated.

Leach: Often, you can use your community networks to get information.

Davis: There are some people in the community that can open doors. We have found that pastors and school principals are good resources to get access to information.

We have started out through small group house meetings — collecting viewpoints and information and concerns. We also have learned not to take information at face value. At a time when it seemed like there was no hiring (Levi-Strauss, a major employer, had closed a plant), we discovered through information collection that some employers were hiring (e.g. importing nurses from Philippines.) We used this information to press for relevant job training.

Wilson (Larry): It is not always easy to get information. We worked to get public records and met resistance to the point of having the files moved away to a distant city. It took us three months in one instance just to find out the time and place of local meetings.

Izumizaki: Each agency has a different way of organizing data. It often is important to be able to break that data down by geography, race, and gender. This can be a challenge even when providers of data are willing to share that data.

Ondrosik: Most communities have a hard time finding out about decisions which affect them

Sometimes, you simply need to battle it out and face up to people in power to get them to give you information.

before they occur.

Thomas: You need lots of stamina and persistence to get agency cooperation.

Wilson (Shelia): Sometimes, you simply need to battle it out and face up to people in power to get them to give you information. The more you do it, provided you are successful, the easier it tends to get.

Schneider: *Can a foundation play a role in gaining access to information? What other advice would you give to foundations?*

Leach: Yes, a foundation can facilitate the process so government agencies can understand what information is needed and why it is important.

Thomas: I am encouraged just to be here, to have the Casey Foundation ask these questions and seek our advice.

My advice to you would be, when you fund projects, one component should be to help the project become self-sustaining. Further, be open-minded to alternative thinking.

Izumizaki: Be very sensitive to communication issues. Create a variety of communication environments to suit a variety of persons. Foundation can help.

Ondrosik: One size does not fit all. You need a menu of options for residents to choose the level of participation that is right for each individual.

Wilson (Larry): You have to find a way to honor local expertise and incorporate it into the overall plan, on an equal basis with professional perspectives. You need to compensate local participants. You need to involve residents in the creation of the agenda and instruments.

Leach: Give the process enough time. Create options for many levels of participation. Do not talk about "technical assistance". Instead, "walk with them," and let relationships get personal. Learn to understand what is happening in a community where there is little hope. Make sure your people working in the community have "community in their heart."

Wilson (Larry): I would like to provide an example of what should not happen. A state was holding community meetings on welfare reform, which welfare recipients were not attending. The county's idea was to give recipients tickets out of the county to a part-time job somewhere else. What recipients wanted to do instead was to ask recipients to help design a survey on what they need and to carry it out. Funders who were approached refused to fund it because no design plan was included. But the design plan was to let the recipients design it!

Leach: When we came before a commission which was reviewing our youth mapping proposal, we were asked about how we were going to do outreach. The whole effort was outreach! The commission was looking for some key words, but not looking at the essence of the proposal.

You have to remember that you cannot please everyone. You have to pick where your allegiances really are. Community people will figure it out, if you do not.

Izumizaki: There is a tendency for foundations to believe that the whole world revolves around their initiative. Foundations need to keep in mind how their initiative fits with other efforts. This is especially true regarding the interaction between national and local foundations. Local foundations often feel that nationals come in and expect the locals to play their tune. Foundations need a long-term vision, broad picture which helps local governments and local funders see how national foundation can contribute and engage without taking over.

Wilson (Larry): You have to remember that you cannot please everyone. You have to pick where your allegiances really are. Community people will figure it out, if you do not.

APPENDIX
Organization Resources

Center for Community Change

The Center for Community Change (CCC) is an organization with over 25 years of experience in helping grassroots leaders build community-based organizations in order to transform low-income communities. The creation of low-income housing, community businesses, jobs, services and long-range plans are all important issues to which CCC lends support and assistance. CCC's focus is on developing the strength of local groups and their advocacy and organizing efforts.

Relevant Publication:

Larry Parachini with Andrew Mott, *Strengthening Community Voices in Policy Reform —Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action Strategies for an Era of Devolution and Change* (Washington, D.C., Center for Community Change, July, 1997).

Commissioned in 1997 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to conduct a study of various community-based research and action efforts, the Center for Community Change produced the above report which contains in-depth descriptions and analysis of a significant number of community efforts to engage in information collection, analysis, learning, and community action. The report discusses elements of citizen involvement drawn from the traditions of citizen monitoring, participatory action research, community organizing and popular education. In addition to descriptions of selected community efforts, the report analyzes lessons learned including outcomes, ingredients of success, barriers, and opportunities. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for further research, information dissemination, and funding to support community monitoring, learning and action strategies.

Contact: Andrew Mott (202) 342-0567

The National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP), Urban Institute

NNIP is a multi-year initiative of the Urban Institute working in partnership with managers of seven of the nation's most advanced existing local neighborhood indicator systems in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Oakland, and Providence. The project's goal is to develop indicators of the changing social, physical, and economic conditions of neighborhoods in America's cities and to apply them in support of comprehensive community building. Specifically, the initiative seeks to help local institutions build sound information systems to enhance community building and city-wide strategic planning; establish a network among local systems managers; and create a national neighborhood data system to enhance understanding of the dynamics of neighborhood change and their implications for policy at the national level. Planning began early in 1995 and implementation is expected to last for at least three years.

Relevant Publication:

Democratizing Information: First Year Report of the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (Washington, D.C., The Urban Institute, March, 1996).

This report summarizes the beginning of the planning phase of the NNIP including partner-

city characteristics, development of indicators, facilitation of local use of national data sets, and project implementation.

Contact: Tom Kingsley (202) 857-8585

The Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago

The Chapin Hall Center for Children is working with several Chicago community collaboratives to improve the cooperation between data sources or analysts and community residents, and to provide training and assistance to communities which wish to build their data collection and analysis skills. Ada Skyles heads this work. A related Chapin Hall publication provies important background information.

Relevant Publication:

Prudence Brown and Sunil Garg, *Foundations and Comprehensive Community Initiatives: The Challenges of Partnership* (Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, April, 1997).

This publication discusses the challenges of adopting bottom-up approaches in situations where foundations are involved in community initiatives and, as the funding source, are accustomed to dictating the direction of the project in a top-down direction which often fails to realistically take into account local needs, preferences and circumstances.

Contacts: Ada Skyles (773) 753-3426
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NATIONAL CENTER FOR SERVICE INTEGRATION PUBLICATIONS

In addition to this document, the National Center for Service Integration has produced eight other resource briefs, four working papers, and three guidebooks on topics of interest to states and communities involved in comprehensive service reform:

RESOURCE BRIEFS **($4 each unless otherwise noted)**

1 *So You Think You Need Some Help? Making Effective Use of Technical Assistance*, by Charles Bruner

2 *Charting a Course: Assessing a Community's Strengths and Needs*, by Charles Bruner, Karen Bell, Claire Brindis, Hedy Chang, and William Scarbrough

3 *Who Should Know What? Confidentiality and Information Sharing in Service Integration*, by Mark I. Soler and Clark M. Peters

4 *Getting to the Bottom Line: State and Community Strategies for Financing Comprehensive Community Service Systems*, by Charles Bruner and Frank Farrow

5 *Getting Started: Planning a Comprehensive Service Initiative*, by Carolyn Marzke and Deborah Both

6 *Making it Simpler: Streamlining and Integrating Intake and Eligibility*, by Allen Kraus and Jolie Bain Pillsbury

7 *Making a Difference: Moving to Outcome-Based Accountability for Comprehensive Service Reforms*, by Nancy Young, Sig Gardner, Soraya Coley, Lisbeth Schorr, and Charles Bruner

8 *Wise Counsel: Redefining the Role of Consumers, Professionals, and Community Workers in the Helping Process*, by Charles Bruner, Edgar S. Cahn, Audrey Gartner, Robert P. Giloth, Toby Herr, Jill Kinney, Janice M. Nittoli, Frank Riessman, Margaret Trent, Yoland Trevino, and Suzanne L. Wagner **($8 each)**

WORKING PAPERS **($4 each)**

Beyond the Buzzwords: Key Principles in Effective Frontline Practice, by Jill Kinney, Kathy Strand, Marge Hagerup, and Charles Bruner

Steps Along an Uncertain Path: State Initiatives Promoting Comprehensive, Community-Based Reform, by Charles Bruner, Deborah Both, and Carolyn Marzke

Realizing a Vision for Children, Families and Neighborhoods: An Alternative to Other Modest Proposals, by Charles Bruner, with foreword by Douglas Nelson and commentary by Otis Johnson

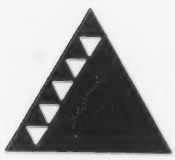
Reinventing Common Sense, by Judith Levey, with introduction by Charles Bruner

GUIDEBOOKS **($12 each)**

Defining the Prize: From Agreed-Upon Outcomes to Results-Based Accountability, by Charles Bruner

Valuing Diversity: Practicing Inclusion, by Hedy Nai-Lin Chang and Charles Bruner

Getting to the Grassroots: Neighborhood Organizing and Mobilization, by Charles Bruner and Maria Chavez



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